

A D D R E S S

TO THE

M E M B E R S

OF THE

Various Box-Clubs and Benefit Societies

IN

G R E A T B R I T A I N,

By STRAP BODKIN, STAYMAKER.

NOT having had the advantage of much school learning, I am afraid I shall not be able to express myself quite so well, or make myself so clearly understood by you, as I could wish; but, at the same time, having the interest of my fellow-tradesmen and mechanics much at heart, I shall use my best endeavours to be serviceable to my fellow-citizens.

The Box Club to which I have belonged these twenty years, was instituted for relieving our sick brethren, burying those that died, and giving support to their widows and children. We went on extremely well, our meetings were numerously attended, our weekly subscriptions regularly paid, and we were enabled to fulfil all the good intentions for which we assembled; and when I was steward, which was but two years back, we had several hundred pounds in the Bank. I had (during the time that I was in office) laid a plan before our Society, to pay a small sum monthly (independent of the Club subscription), and draw it out every Christmas; and it was found of great use to many of the Members, and made them very comfortable at that season. Our affairs were in this flourishing state; peace, harmony, and innocent mirth reigned at our meetings. If a Member was noisy or abusive, we blacked his face; if profane and quarrelsome, we fined him; and if turbulent, obscene, and noisily bad, we expelled him (though that has happened but once since I have belonged to the Club). I should have remarked, that our Landlord always brought up the Daily Advertiser at our meetings, which one of the Members read, and, except when Colonel (I've forgot his name) came among us during the Westminster Election, and took the chair, I scarcely had ever heard any political topics (I think they are called) started in the Society. Things were in this agreeable situation when Mr. Dott, who wrote for Mr. Brief, who was clerk to Mr. Capias, who was agent to Serjeant Magpie, who belonged to the Constitutional Society, came among us, though several of the old members objected to having any Lawyers in the Club; because at our last Bean-feast, at the Three Hats, two of these gentry, Tangle and Snare, somehow or other were invited, and contrived to set Trowel and Horseshoe together by the ears, and then advised them to have an action of assault and battery (as they call'd it), which laid one of the combatants in a jail, and nearly ruined the other. I reminded the Club of this, but to no purpose; Dott was elected, and soon after began to take the management of affairs into his own hands.—He doubted the legality of our meetings—thought we were not safe with respect to the Trustees in whose names our cash was deposited in the Bank; nay hinted, he suspected the security of the Bank itself. When he had caused much uneasiness among the Members by these insinuations, and rendered the Society out of humour with each other, he took great pains to point out the inconvenience of the house in which we had so long assembled; the neglect of the servants and incivility of the Landlord, who was not thought by Mr. Dott to be sufficiently respectful; then forming a party, he turned the Committee and Stewards out of their places, and changed the house to one more fashionable, as he called it. He now proposed allowing persons under the description of Visiting Members to attend our Meetings; and they being generally the friends of Dott, and complaining of every person and thing that was not exactly to their opinions, were always sure to promote discontent and ill-humour among us. Thus, by having the knavery and rapacity of the great, the burthens that fall upon the poor, the vast profits of masters, and the lowness of journeymen's wages, din'd continually in our ears, we were rendered so uneasy in our situations, that we began to neglect our business, and agreed to meet every night; when, instead of spending three-pence halfpenny, we ran up a reckoning which our pay (even if we had worked our full time) could not afford. The friends of Dott advised us, that the only way to bring our masters to reason was, to go to our different shopmates and desire them to strike. It was next proposed that Dott should be made Secretary, and that the money in our Box, which was intended for the relief of sickness, age, and decent interment, should be employed in the maintenance of such refractory journeymen as neglected their business, till they could do what they called "bringing their masters to reason." But when necessity drove Masters to comply with their demands, it afforded no occasion for exultation; as many Members were (by numbers of hands coming in from the country) driven entirely out of bread, and obliged to submit upon the fund of the Box. Our Club, though more numerous, was now neither so sociable

or useful as it had been formerly; our money, which the old Members had hoarded with so much care against a rainy day, was hourly decreasing.

Mr. Dott next thought proper to bring books to the Club, which I think they called "The Rights of Man," and as they were at a small price, we were persuaded to purchase them, from a notion that they taught people to live without labour. For my part, I can't say I liked their maxims, for they seemed to me to be written to lead us plain people astray: For, says I to myself, this Mister Paine seems to wish for a change of Government; but why, as we have for some years enjoyed the blessings of peace, as trade has increased, and is daily increasing, as all things have for a long time gone on smoothly and prosperously, and as the greatest part of our grievances are in the brains and hearts of wicked and designing people, why should we wish to change our present happy situation? I'm sure, as for myself and all my neighbours who have a little property to lose, we dread a change, and are determined to preserve it; as it is the opinion of much wiser heads than mine, that this Mister Paine, and a set of needy wretches that he is connected with, only want to make a general scramble, that they may have an opportunity to catch what they can.

Our Secretary, Mr. Dott, next proposed that the name of the Club should be altered to that of a Convention; the strangers that visited us of a Wednesday night were now called Delegates; if a Member absented himself he became an Emigrant; if it was thought proper to fine one, he was brought before the Tribunal; to the benches they gave the name of Sections; the lower end of the table was called the Bar; our weekly contributions a Revenue; and myself the *Ci-Devant* President. Defects had been discovered in our Articles; so, to crown the whole, nine of our Members were directed to frame a new Constitution. Such is our present situation; we are continually forming schemes for the Public good, and have proposed a method for the payment of the National Debt, lessening the Taxes, and regulating the Civil List. But whatever good we may do to the Public in general, I am sure our private affairs have gone on miserably; for by neglecting our business, spending our own money, and wasting that of the Box (which should have been reserved for the hour of sickness or adversity), many of my acquaintance who used to be satisfied with their stations, and by their industry maintained their wives and families comfortably, have, since they began to talk of Liberty and Equality, Aristocrats and Democrats, and twenty other hard words which I never heard of before, been obliged to part with their goods to appease their landlords; their clothes to supply themselves with victuals, or rather drink (for I always remarked that the greatest politicians among us were the greatest drunkards); their children have been sent to the workhouse; and their wives (from the contagion of bad example) have become as negligent as themselves; and very frequently more serious consequences have ensued from their political profligacy.

Let us, therefore, my worthy fellow-citizens, avoid the evil I have above stated, by paying no attention whatever to the counsels of those Incendiaries who endeavour to poison and deprave the public mind by whispering treason and disloyalty to the members of your different Societies. Let us venerate the Government from which our fathers and fathers' fathers derived security and happiness. Let us pay that respect to the Monarch to which he is entitled both by his virtues and situation. Let us treat our superiors with deference and esteem as long as they direct their influence to the service, and not to the oppression of their inferiors. Let us consider our religious opinions (to whatever sect we may belong) to have their foundation in obedience to the Divine commands, submission to the laws of our country, peace, charity, and love toward each other, and there is no doubt but that the many blessings we derive from our Constitution will still continue to be the envy of other nations, in spite of the endeavours of concealed incendiaries, or those that avow themselves the authors of schemes which they know are impracticable, and which, if they could be carried into execution, would be only productive of that confusion it seems to be the first wish of their hearts to promote.—That we may avoid the snare that is laid for us, is,

My worthy Fellow-Citizens,

The sincere Prayer of

Your Friend and Servant,

STRAP BODKIN.